

**Benchmarking Excellence
Among Accredited
Economic Development Organizations**

BENCHMARKING EXCELLENCE AMONG ACCREDITED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Results of the 2009 Quality Management Survey

Prepared for

International Economic Development Council

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INTRODUCTION

In search of competitive excellence, economic developers often ask for guidance and assistance on key enterprise management and operational issues relating to running a quality economic development program. They are interested in operating as effectively as possible, in making the highest possible impact, and in having a knowledge system in place for tracking their performance to enable continual improvement.

To assist in this arena, the Calibration Program™ was designed by the Georgia Tech Enterprise Innovation Institute (EI²) to help local economic development organizations (EDOs) achieve higher performance in their operations. The program draws on quality management standards from the International Economic Development Council's (IEDC) Accredited Economic Development Organization (AEDO) program, the International Organization of Standardization (ISO), the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program - and, the expertise of professionals associated with EI².

To provide benchmarks for EDOs via this program, IEDC and EI² launched a joint initiative in 2006 to benchmark excellence in quality management among AEDOs located across the United States. These organizations were selected for participation in the survey because they have been recognized by IEDC for their enterprise excellence and, therefore, represent the “best of the best” in economic development. This initiative has informed other EDOs on what it takes to be a high-performance organization in economic development, as well as identified opportunities for continual improvement. It has provided a set of often-cited benchmarks.

In 2009, IEDC and EI² launched a new initiative to create up-to-date benchmarks by surveying current AEDOs. Stakeholders from each organization were asked to assess their organization on the basis of key indicators related to quality management – in the following areas of operational criteria:

- Leadership
- Human Resources
- Strategic Planning
- Customer and Market Focus
- Use of Technology
- Performance Tracking System
- Communications System
- Process Management
- Partnerships and Relationships
- Results

These 10 quality management areas include seven Baldrige award criteria and three additional criteria specifically relevant to economic development organizations. Also included were quality management indicators relating to innovation management and sustainability.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The 2009 survey utilized the 2006 metrics and included more than a dozen additional metrics identified by IEDC and EI² team members. For example, a few measures relating to sustainability were added given that there has been increasing recognition of the importance of adopting “green” measures and programs to support the health, attractiveness, and future of a community’s livability and economic prosperity. In total, 127 metrics were utilized in the 2009 survey.

Beyond including the additional metrics, the 2009 effort has some other key differences from the 2006 effort. First, the group of AEDOs represented in the two surveys is not the same – that is - the 2009 effort included organizations that did not participate in the 2006 effort and some organizations participating in the 2006 survey did not participate in the 2009 effort. And for those seven AEDOs that did participate in both efforts, there were some differences in the actual stakeholders who provided insights on their behalf – although in both years stakeholders were chosen for their direct knowledge of AEDO operations.

Also, the economic environment existing during the 2009 survey differed significantly from that of the earlier survey. It is very likely this changing environment had some impact on EDO operations.

Therefore, beyond general observations at the quality management level and, in certain circumstances, for metrics utilized in both years, the 2009 results cannot be comparatively analyzed against the 2006 results to draw any sweeping conclusions. Instead, the 2009 survey should be viewed as an up-to-date snapshot with new benchmarks. And, like the 2006 survey, it provides some qualified benchmarks regarding management practices employed by economic development organizations recognized for their excellence.

ABOUT THE CALIBRATION PROGRAM™

The goal of the Georgia Tech EI²’s Calibration Program™ is to help inform economic development organizations in their efforts to achieve ongoing excellence. Such efforts often involve enterprise transformation and key management tools for enabling such transformation. This program provides organizations with independent insights that enable the following:

- Better understanding of operational gaps and opportunities for achieving organizational excellence.
- Improving management systems to operate more effectively and efficiently, and for building a stronger organization.
- Heightened community recognition that the EDO is a well-managed, highly professional organization.
- Improved readiness to participate in IEDC’s process to become an AEDO, a national standard for excellence.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Stakeholders from 17 of the 22 AEDOs participated in the assessment survey in 2009. Seven of these organizations also participated in the 2006 assessment (and are identified with an asterisk in the below list). These entities are among a highly selective group recognized by IEDC for their excellence in economic development and therefore are considered among the “best of the best.” The participating organizations represented 10 of the 12 states housing an AEDO. Organizations represented areas from across the United States, such as: the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, South, Midwest, Southwest, and West.

- The Beacon Council (Florida)*
- Berks Economic Partnership (Pennsylvania)
- Business Development Board of Palm Beach County, Inc. (Florida)
- Cabarrus Regional Partnership (North Carolina)
- City of Virginia Beach Department of Economic Development (Virginia)*
- Fond du Lac County Economic Development Corporation (Wisconsin)*
- Greater Conroe Economic Development Council (Texas)
- Hampton Roads Economic Development Alliance (Virginia)*
- Jefferson Parish Economic Development Commission (Louisiana)
- Laredo Development Foundation (Texas)
- Muncie-Delaware County Economic Development Alliance (Indiana)*
- North Carolina's Eastern Region (North Carolina)
- Sacramento Area Commerce & Trade Organization (California)*
- State of Delaware Economic Development Office (Delaware)
- State of Louisiana Economic Development (Louisiana)
- Tulare County Economic Development Corporation (California)
- Tyler County Chamber & Economic Development Council (Texas)*

Organizations were represented by up to five individuals, each of whom fell into one of four categories: AEDO president/executive, AEDO staff, member of the AEDO board of directors or supervisory body (henceforth referred to as “board”), or an external stakeholder with direct knowledge of the AEDO’s operations. All but two organizations had at least one member of their board participate in the survey; 82 percent had participation by their president/executive; 59 percent engaged at least one external stakeholder in the effort; and 41 percent had representation by at least one staff person other than the president/executive.

The stakeholders completed an online confidential survey and were asked to rate their AEDO according to several indicators relating to organizational processes or operations. They were asked to use a scale from 1 to 5 where “1” meant “strongly disagree” and “5” meant “strongly agree.” Two additional choices were “NA” for “Not Applicable” and “DK” for “Don’t Know.”

Because the level participation varied among the organizations, responses in the analysis were weighted for equal representation for each organization. This was done so that no one organization’s ratings were over- or underrepresented in the final analysis due to the number of participants.

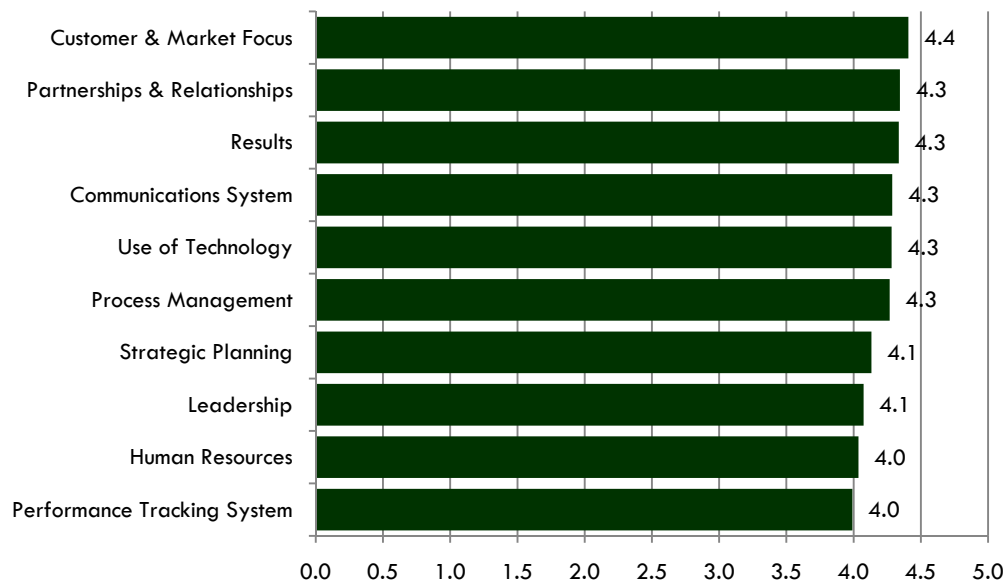
OVERALL¹

The AEDOs received top marks in the management areas of Customer and Market Focus, Partnerships and Relationships, and Results. These results suggest that, overall, the AEDOs have successfully implemented key activities related to internal and external relationship building, a primary factor leading to success in these three management areas.

The top three rated areas in 2009 largely resembled those in 2006. Customer and Market Focus was the top-rated management area in both years. In 2006, Results ranked second while Partnerships and Relationships received third top billing. Performance Tracking was the lowest-rated quality management area in 2006 and 2009. Beyond this, the current overall results differ some from 2006. Of the 10 management areas, Use of Technology and Communications System had the largest gains in their relative overall rankings (from 8th to 5th for Use of Technology, and from 6th to 4th for Communications System). From 2006 to 2009, Human Resources dropped significantly in its relative ranking, from 4th to 9th.

In 2009, the AEDOs were rated highly in all 10 quality management areas overall, with an average rating of 4.0 or above. This represents some improvement over 2006, where this was the case for eight of the 10 areas.

Key Quality Management Areas Weighted Average Ratings



Source: Georgia Tech Enterprise Innovation Institute Benchmarking Survey of AEDOs 2009

¹ All ratings rounded to the nearest tenth.

For the 127 indicators within the 2009 survey, there was an overall average weighted score of 4.2 and a median rating of 4.2, which is significantly above the midway mark on the scale of 1 to 5.

Following is a summary of ratings per key management area. Overall weighted average and median ratings for each of the 10 areas are provided. The top three indicators per area are also noted in the right-hand column. Indicators highlighted in *italics* are those indicators that were also among the top-three-rated indicators by stakeholders in the 2006 survey.

MANAGEMENT AREA	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	TOP THREE INDICATORS
Leadership	4.1	4.1	<i>EDO board has reasonable expectations of the staff and the organization</i> <i>Community leadership is supportive of economic development</i> <i>EDO board regularly evaluates outcomes according to annual objectives</i>
Human Resources	4.0	4.2	<i>Staff keep board informed on important operational issues</i> <i>Staff are provided with effective orientation and training</i> <i>Staff are supported in their pursuit of professional development</i>
Strategic Planning	4.1	4.2	<i>EDO monitors and tracks progress in implementing the strategic plan, and updates it accordingly</i> <i>Strategic plan adequately addresses marketing and recruitment needs</i> <i>EDO guided by well-conceived, up-to-date strategic plan</i>
Customer and Market Focus	4.4	4.5	<i>Office is easy to find and is centrally located</i> <i>EDO understands and addresses needs of prospects</i> <i>Office provides privacy for conferences</i>

MANAGEMENT AREA	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	TOP THREE INDICATORS
Use of Technology	4.3	4.3	<p>EDO effectively utilizes electronic or Web-based research services</p> <p><i>Online services provided through Web site or other mechanism</i></p> <p><i>EDO has adequate communications tools for staff connectivity</i></p>
Performance Tracking System	4.0	4.0	<p><i>Board and staff receive all information needed to work effectively</i></p> <p><i>EDO utilizes an effective performance tracking system</i></p> <p><i>Performance tracking system provides all information needed to measure EDO's work</i></p>
Communications System	4.3	4.3	<p><i>EDO regularly issues electronic and/or print news materials</i></p> <p><i>Web site is easy to navigate</i></p> <p><i>Web site is regularly updated with all key information</i></p>
Process Management	4.3	4.3	<p><i>EDO response to customers and stakeholders is timely and effective</i></p> <p><i>EDO has effective referral system with state, regional, and other partners</i></p> <p><i>Executive director has adequate control over work processes</i></p>
Partnerships & Relationships	4.3	4.4	<p><i>EDO has effective relationship with statewide and regional economic development partners</i></p> <p><i>EDO has effective relationship with local government</i></p> <p><i>Board members are actively involved in other community organizations</i></p>
Results	4.3	4.4	<p><i>EDO obeys laws and regulations</i></p> <p><i>EDO demonstrates high standards and ethics</i></p> <p><i>EDO has had a positive impact on the community's economic development</i></p>

Interwoven among the 127 indicators were indicators that also measured the propensity for innovation within the AEDO. Following is a summary of the overall results and top three indicators related to Innovation Management. Highlighted in *italics* is the indicator also among the top three rated by stakeholders in 2006.

MANAGEMENT AREA	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	TOP THREE INDICATORS
Innovation	4.2	4.2	EDO effectively utilizes internal knowledge sources to improve its work processes <i>EDO shares and receives ideas with and from other EDOs</i> EDO is innovative

LEADERSHIP

No matter the year or the decade, success boils down to leadership. Leadership had an average weighted rating of 4.1 and a median rating of 4.1, exceeding the ratings provided for this quality management area in 2006. Of note, all the Leadership indicators received a rating above 3.0, the midway mark on the rating scale.

The Leadership indicator addressing whether the EDO board has reasonable expectations of the staff and the organization received the highest weighted average within this management area (4.4). This was also a top-three-rated indicator in 2006. Rounding out the top three in terms of Leadership indicators were: community leadership is supportive of economic development (4.3) and the EDO board regularly evaluates outcomes according to annual objectives (4.3).

The lowest rated indicators, which can be understood as those representing the greatest opportunities for improvement, include: participation in board training programs (3.6), community leadership embraces change and new ideas (3.8), and the board's toleration of mistakes when trying new ideas (3.8). These three were also the lowest-rated indicators by AEDO stakeholders in 2006.

LEADERSHIP INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. The EDO board (or similar form of supervisory body) has reasonable expectations of the staff and the organization and is supportive of staff.	4.4
2. Community leadership is supportive of economic development.	4.3
3. The EDO board regularly evaluates outcomes according to annual objectives.	4.3

LEADERSHIP INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
4. The EDO has a clear vision and mission that its leaders effectively communicate, support, and model throughout the organization.	4.2
5. The EDO board has an effective board rotation (leadership succession) policy that is reviewed and updated on a regular basis.	4.2
6. The EDO board regularly shares information about the EDO with community stakeholders.	4.2
7. The EDO board works within the community to remove barriers to economic development progress.	4.2
8. The EDO board expects, evaluates, and rewards innovative performance by staff.	4.0
9. The EDO board actively works to secure increased funding for the EDO.	4.0
10. The EDO board lets staff know what it thinks is most important and regularly asks staff for input.	4.0
11. The EDO board represents the diversity of the community (e.g., age, gender, race, ethnicity).	3.9
12. The EDO board tolerates and accepts mistakes when trying new ideas.	3.8
13. Community leadership embraces change and new ideas.	3.8
14. The EDO board participates in appropriate board member training programs.	3.6
AVERAGE	4.1
MEDIAN	4.1

HUMAN RESOURCES

As in all organizations, the success of the economic development organization rests on its people. The overall weighted average rating for the Human Resources management area was 4.0, with a median of 4.2, which was on par with the median in 2006. However, unlike 2006, this management category was among the bottom three, in terms of overall ratings, in 2009. In addition, there were a number of indicators that did not receive as high an average rating in 2009 as in 2006. In 2006, six indicators had an average rating of 4.4 or above, but none did in 2009.

The AEDOs were viewed strongest for staff keeping the board informed on important operational issues (4.3); staff being provided with effective orientation and training (4.3); staff being encouraged, supported and active in their pursuit of professional development (4.3); staff having the ability to influence the

organization's program of work (4.3); and staff receiving satisfactory benefits packages (4.3).

Leading the Human Resources-related opportunities for improvement was offering staff incentives for "clean commute" options such as carpooling, biking, and riding public transportation (2.6). Other top opportunities for improvement were providing staff with the resources they need to do their job effectively (3.9); establishing practices to ensure successful staff leadership transitions (3.9); staff turnover (3.9); and recruiting new talent (3.9). Of note, staff turnover was not viewed as a significant among the AEDO stakeholders in 2006.

HUMAN RESOURCES INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. Staff keep the board informed on important operational issues.	4.3
2. Staff are provided with effective orientation and training.	4.3
3. Staff are encouraged, supported, and active in their pursuit of further professional development.	4.3
4. Staff have the ability to influence the organization's program of work.	4.3
5. Staff receive satisfactory benefits packages, including health insurance.	4.3
6. The board and staff agree on matters of job description.	4.2
7. The EDO has satisfactory staff support.	4.2
8. Staff regularly create, share, and apply new ideas.	4.1
9. Staff are compensated satisfactorily and fairly, and are adequately rewarded for performance with incentives, bonuses, or other mechanisms.	4.0
10. The EDO actively recruits new talent to its staff (e.g., recruitment of experienced professionals; intern and similar training programs for newcomers to the field).	3.9
11. Staff turnover is not a significant problem for the EDO.	3.9
12. The EDO has practices in place to ensure successful leadership transitions at the staff level.	3.9
13. Staff have everything they need to do their job effectively.	3.9
14. Staff are provided incentives to encourage "clean commute" options, such as riding light rail, carpooling, biking, etc.	2.6
AVERAGE	4.0
MEDIAN	4.2

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning is incredibly important to develop an organizational vision, to provide sound direction, and to manage the sea of change for positive outcomes. In a change from 2006 findings, AEDO stakeholders in 2009 rated how their EDO regularly monitors and tracks implementation as the highest-rated factor within the Strategic Planning management area (4.5). In 2006, this indicator ranked 10th among the Strategic Planning indicators. Overall, the Strategic Planning management area had an above-average rating of 4.1 and a median of 4.2. Receiving second top billing in this area in terms of average rating was addressing needs for marketing and recruitment (4.5). Other indicators related to having a plan and implementing it tied for third place in the rankings. Beyond marketing and recruitment, the AEDOs received high average ratings for their support of existing businesses and industries (4.3), but less so for the equally important area of support of entrepreneurs and small businesses (4.0).

Among the lowest-scoring indicators were how effectively the strategic plan addressed tourism development (3.4), sustainability/green development (3.4), and downtown development/redevelopment (3.5). Possibly explaining these low rankings is that many EDOs may not view these functions as top responsibilities, especially if other community-based organizations focus on such matters. Regarding sustainability/green development considerations, incorporating such considerations into an economic development program of work is an emerging trend among EDOs – and, a recent IEDC survey found that many EDOs are still determining how to pursue and finance such work.

STRATEGIC PLANNING INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. The EDO regularly monitors and tracks progress in implementing the strategic plan, and updates it accordingly.	4.5
2. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to marketing and recruitment.	4.5
3. The EDO is guided by a well-conceived, up-to-date strategic plan.	4.4
4. I have read and fully understand the strategic plan.	4.4
5. The EDO regularly partners with other community groups and organizations in the implementation of its strategic plan.	4.4
6. There has been successful implementation of the economic development strategic plan.	4.4
7. The EDO adopts annual objectives that are measurable and purposeful for reaching the strategic goals and opportunities identified in the strategic plan.	4.4
8. Diverse community stakeholders have been involved in developing, implementing, and updating the strategic plan.	4.3

STRATEGIC PLANNING INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
9. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to supporting existing business and industry.	4.3
10. The EDO's strategic plan is in sync with the community's comprehensive plan.	4.2
11. The EDO's strategic plan reflects some incorporation of new ideas and strategies that differ from those tried in previous years.	4.2
12. Satisfactory resources are available to the EDO for implementing strategic plan goals and objectives.	4.2
13. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to workforce development.	4.1
14. The EDO regularly publicizes strategic planning progress to community and external stakeholders.	4.1
15. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses.	4.0
16. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to advancing community livability.	3.9
17. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to downtown development/redevelopment.	3.5
18. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to sustainability/green development.	3.4
19. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to tourism development.	3.4
AVERAGE	4.1
MEDIAN	4.2

CUSTOMER AND MARKET FOCUS

Quality management experts agree - *focus on the customer* is the key to organizational success. Overall, the Customer and Market Focus management area was the highest rated of all 10 areas, echoing the 2006 survey. The overall average was 4.4 and median was 4.5. No indicator in this area had a rating less than 4.0.

The highest-rated indicators within Customer and Market Focus were among the highest rated in the survey and included the central location of the EDO office (4.7), the EDO effectiveness at understanding and addressing the needs of prospects (4.6), and the EDO's office privacy for conferences (4.6). These, along with customer friendliness, were also among the top-three-rated indicators in 2006, with two indicators nearly tying for third place. Also receiving high ratings

in 2009 were the EDO staff's reputation for being "customer-friendly" (4.6); the professionalism and up-to-date nature of the EDO's community information and marketing materials (4.5); the functionality and orderliness of the EDO office (4.5); and the EDO's effective communication on the community's competitive advantage (4.5).

The indicator that represents the area for the greatest opportunity for improvement is the EDO's effectiveness at understanding and addressing the needs of visitors and newcomers to the community (4.0). Perhaps this finding is related to the tourism development component being the most inadequately addressed element of the AEDO's strategic plans (with a rating of 3.4, as identified in the previous Strategic Planning management area).

CUSTOMER AND MARKET FOCUS INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. The EDO's office is easy to find and centrally located within its service area.	4.7
2. The EDO is effective at understanding and addressing the needs of prospects.	4.6
3. The EDO's office provides privacy for conferences.	4.6
4. The EDO staff are known for being "customer-friendly."	4.6
5. The EDO's community information and marketing materials are current and professional in appearance.	4.5
6. The EDO's office is functional, well-maintained, and orderly.	4.5
7. The EDO effectively communicates the community's competitive advantages to customers and stakeholders.	4.5
8. The EDO is effective at understanding and addressing the needs of existing business and industry.	4.4
9. The EDO is effective at understanding and addressing the needs of entrepreneurs and emerging industry.	4.2
10. The EDO regularly solicits and incorporates input and feedback from its customers.	4.2
11. The EDO is effective at understanding and addressing the needs of community citizens.	4.2
12. The EDO is effective at understanding the needs of the community's workforce.	4.2
13. The EDO is effective at understanding and addressing the needs of visitors and newcomers.	4.0
AVERAGE	4.4
MEDIAN	4.5

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

As economic development organizations are often the first and main point of contact for current and future investors, their use of technology can provide some reflection about whether the community can suit the investors' technology needs. The Use of Technology management area had an overall median of 4.3 and average of 4.3, notably higher than the ratings in 2006, with weighted averages for indicators ranging from 3.8 to 4.6. The ratings suggest that the AEDOs are doing well implementing and utilizing certain technologies – such as electronic/Web-based research services (4.6), online services via their Web site (4.5), and adequate communications tools for staff connectivity (4.5).

Topping the opportunities for improvement in this management area appears to be the perception of the AEDO as a community leader in the use of technology (3.8). In addition, the AEDOs may be able to more effectively pursue opportunities for improvement related to having a satisfactory budget for purchasing and upgrading technology tools (4.0) and disposing of old technologies in an environmentally sustainability manner (4.1).

USE OF TECHNOLOGY INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. The EDO effectively utilizes electronic or Web-based research services.	4.6
2. The EDO provides online services through its Web site or another mechanism.	4.5
3. The EDO uses adequate communications tools for supporting staff connectivity (e.g., e-mail, voice mail, call forwarding, remote access, personal digital assistants)	4.5
4. Staff have access to all the technology tools they need to do their job effectively.	4.4
5. The EDO effectively utilizes the latest office technologies to enhance productivity and efficiency.	4.3
6. The EDO has adequate presentation capabilities.	4.2
7. Staff receive regular training to learn about and apply new technologies.	4.2
8. The EDO disposes of old technologies in an environmentally sustainable manner.	4.1
9. The EDO has a satisfactory budget for purchasing and upgrading technology tools (e.g., computer hardware, software, personal handhelds, digital phones).	4.0
10. The EDO is viewed as a community leader in the use of technology.	3.8
AVERAGE	4.3
MEDIAN	4.3

PERFORMANCE TRACKING SYSTEM

It's almost impossible to know when you're really successful unless you have a system in place to measure success as well as failure. The Performance Tracking System was the lowest-rated management area in 2009, as well as in 2006, with an average score of 4.0 and median of 4.0. However, the overall ratings in this area in 2009 were notably higher than in 2006.

The amount of information the board and staff receive to effectively do their work was the highest rated Performance Tracking System indicator (4.2) in 2009, similar to 2006. Rounding out the top three in 2009 were the utilization of an effective performance tracking system (4.2) and having a system to provide all information needed to measure the quality of the EDO's work (4.1). The same was true in 2006, but in reverse order.

The lowest-rated indicator was the use of the performance tracking system to measure the impact of new ideas on meeting EDO objectives (3.9). Other lower-rated indicators included using the system to make appropriate adjustments to staff salaries or bonus scales (3.9); making appropriate changes to the strategic plan or program of work (3.9); and whether board and staff know how to review the system's metrics to determine if changes are needed (3.9). Collectively, these four indicators suggest EDOs may be able to better maximize the potential utility of using performance data to inform management decisions.

PERFORMANCE TRACKING SYSTEM INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. The board and staff receive all the information they need to do their work effectively.	4.2
2. The EDO utilizes an effective performance tracking system.	4.2
3. The performance tracking system provides all the information needed to measure the quality of the EDO's work.	4.1
4. The board and staff use the performance tracking system to measure the impact of specific strategies and activities.	4.0
5. The board and staff use the performance tracking system to make decisions regarding future investment of time and funding.	4.0
6. The performance tracking system includes metrics tied to the EDO's strategic plan.	4.0
7. The board and staff know how to review the performance tracking system's metrics to determine if changes are needed.	3.9
8. The board and staff regularly make appropriate changes in the EDO's strategic plan and program of work based on the performance tracking system.	3.9

PERFORMANCE TRACKING SYSTEM INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
9. The board and staff use the performance tracking system to make appropriate adjustments to staff salaries or bonus scales.	3.9
10. The performance tracking system enables the board and staff to measure the impact of new ideas on meeting EDO objectives.	3.9
AVERAGE	4.0
MEDIAN	4.0

COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

As EDO executives know, there is a significant difference between perception and reality. Having an effective communications system is vital for positioning reality based messages to communicate an EDO's efforts effectively with internal and external stakeholders. The Communications System management area received an overall average rating of 4.3 and median of 4.3 in 2009, exceeding the ratings in 2006.

Receiving top billing were the issuance of news releases and related activities (4.5), which was also the case in 2006; Web site navigability (4.5); and the degree to which the Web site is up-to-date (4.5).

The AEDO stakeholders provided the lowest average rating for doing an effective job of informing the general public on activities and accomplishments (3.9). Going hand-in-hand with this and also low-rated was how well community stakeholders are informed on EDO activities and progress (4.0).

COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. The EDO regularly issues electronic and/or print news releases, newsletters, or other materials on its activities and progress.	4.5
2. The EDO's Web site is easy to navigate.	4.5
3. The EDO's Web site is regularly updated with all the key information and resources needed by its customers.	4.5
4. State and regional partners are adequately informed on EDO activities and progress.	4.4
5. The EDO regularly updates the state's and other resource partners' Web sites and databases with community information.	4.3
6. The EDO's Web site has been designed to rank highly on the key Internet search engines.	4.2

COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
7. Community stakeholders are adequately informed on EDO activities and progress.	4.0
8. The EDO does an effective job of informing the general public on activities and accomplishments.	3.9
AVERAGE	4.3
MEDIAN	4.3

PROCESS MANAGEMENT

Operating an economic development organization is an ongoing process of continual improvement. The Process Management quality management indicator that received the most positive rating was the ability to respond to customers and stakeholders in a timely and effective manner (4.6), which is consistent with the finding that, overall, the AEDOs scored best in the Customer and Market Focus management area. Nearly tying for top billing was the indicator that the EDO has an effective referral system with state, regional, and resource partners, an indicator that did not make the top three in 2006.

The importance of the executive director having adequate control over the organization's work processes was echoed in both years, as this indicator made the top three in both years. The overall average rating for Process Management was 4.3, and the median was 4.3 in 2009, exceeding the ratings in 2006.

There is one Process Management indicator that was among those survey indicators in greatest need of improvement - specifically, implementing recycling and similar processes (3.6). The second-lowest-rated indicator within Process Management concerned having an adequate level of reserve funds (3.9). The greening of operations and managing of finances have been emerging as two high priority and high visibility concerns in 2009, given the national economy. The rating for these indicators may reflect the relative inexperience that AEDOs generally may have with these practices as well as a heightened standard stakeholders may have for their AEDO's performance in these areas. Rounding out the bottom three in 2009, and, thus representing the third top opportunity for improvement, was the EDO having adequate staff and resources to complete its work processes (4.1). This indicator was identified as the top opportunity for improvement in this area in 2006.

PROCESS MANAGEMENT INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. The EDO is able to respond to its customers and stakeholders in a timely and effective manner.	4.6
2. The EDO has an effective referral system with state, regional, and other resource partners.	4.6
3. The executive director has adequate control over the organization's work processes.	4.5
4. The EDO effectively utilizes internal knowledge sources to continually improve its work processes.	4.5
5. The EDO has effective procedures in place to guide work processes.	4.5
6. Non-executive staff have adequate control over their areas of responsibility.	4.3
7. The EDO effectively utilizes external knowledge sources to continually improve its work processes.	4.3
8. The EDO makes changes to the work processes based on customer and stakeholder feedback.	4.2
9. The EDO implements innovative practices for addressing customer and stakeholder needs.	4.2
10. The EDO has adequate staff and resources to complete its work processes.	4.1
11. The EDO has an adequate level of reserve funds to utilize during challenging budgetary times.	3.9
12. The EDO implements recycling and/or other environmentally sustainable processes in its everyday operations.	3.6
AVERAGE	4.3
MEDIAN	4.3

PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

In economic development, the success of an EDO rests on its effective partnerships and relationships at the local, state, regional, and federal levels. The Partnerships and Relationships management area was the second-highest-rated among the 10 areas of quality management in 2009 with an overall average of 4.3 and median of 4.4. It was also a top-three rated area in 2006.

The highest rated item, with a score of 4.6, regarded the EDO having an effective relationship with statewide and regional partners. Nearly tying for top place was the indicator regarding the EDO's relationships with local government (4.6). Together, these suggest that generally the AEDOs have positive relationships with multiple levels of government overseeing their jurisdictions. These indicators were

also among the top three in 2006. The next-highest-rated indicators speak to community relations - specifically commending board members for being actively involved in other community organizations (4.5); the work the AEDO does to collaborate with other EDOs in the region (4.5); and the EDO exchanging ideas with other EDOs (4.5).

Areas where the “best of the best” may benefit from improving their partnership- and relationship-building activities include expanding EDO resources through relationships with alternative funding sources (3.8); collaborating effectively with community-based organizations (4.2); having active involvement of staff in other community organizations (4.2); and engaging partners to develop new ideas (4.2).

PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. The EDO has an effective relationship with statewide and regional economic development partners.	4.6
2. The EDO has an effective relationship with local government.	4.6
3. Board members are actively involved in other community organizations.	4.5
4. The EDO collaborates effectively with other EDOs in the region.	4.5
5. The EDO shares and receives ideas with and from other EDOs.	4.5
6. The EDO collaborates effectively with other local EDOs in the community.	4.4
7. The EDO enjoys satisfactory stakeholder support from the business community, political leadership, and neighborhood or other groups that are essential to its mission.	4.4
8. The EDO collaborates effectively with nearby four-year colleges and universities, technical colleges, and community colleges.	4.3
9. The EDO has an effective relationship with area legislators.	4.3
10. The EDO has an effective relationship with local and regional media.	4.3
11. The EDO engages partners to develop new ideas.	4.2
12. Staff are actively involved in other community organizations.	4.2
13. The EDO collaborates effectively with community-based organizations (e.g., civic groups, schools, social service groups, environmental groups).	4.2
14. The EDO has been able to expand its resources through relationships with alternative funding sources.	3.8
AVERAGE	4.3
MEDIAN	4.4

RESULTS

At the end of the day, no matter the industry or organization, what matters most is what results you produce. The Results quality management area ranked third among quality management areas in 2009 for its ratings and was also among the top three in 2006. Three indicators topped the list in terms of average rating in 2009 - obeying laws and regulations (4.7), demonstrating high standards and ethics (4.7), and having a positive impact on the community's economic development (4.6) – as was the case in 2006. Overall, the Results management area had an average score of 4.3 and a median of 4.4, on par with what was seen in 2006.

The top three opportunities for improvement in this area, including two which had a weighted average below 4.0, were having a reliable funding structure and receipt of financial support from several sources (3.7); the community citizens' satisfaction with the organization's overall performance (3.9); and receiving fair and adequate media coverage (4.0). The latter two were also among the top three opportunities for improvement identified in 2006. Perhaps there is an opportunity to more effectively raise awareness, via public relations and related activities, regarding positive performance measures and "wins" for which the EDO is responsible. This may be particularly beneficial during national or local economic downturns, when it can be challenging for citizens to feel positive about economic development activities at any level of government.

RESULTS INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. The EDO obeys laws and regulations.	4.7
2. The EDO demonstrates high standards and ethics.	4.7
3. The EDO has had a positive impact on the community's economic development.	4.6
4. The EDO is considered a local expert on economic matters.	4.6
5. The EDO regularly and effectively completes its annual program of work.	4.5
6. The board is satisfied with the organization's performance overall.	4.4
7. The EDO is innovative.	4.4
8. The EDO regularly meets or exceeds annual objectives.	4.3
9. Staff are satisfied with the organization's performance overall.	4.3
10. Community leaders are satisfied with the organization's performance overall.	4.3
11. The EDO receives adequate, fair, and balanced media coverage of its outcomes and performance.	4.0

RESULTS INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
12. Community citizens are satisfied with the organization's performance overall.	3.9
13. The EDO has a reliable funding structure and receives financial support from several sources.	3.7
AVERAGE	4.3
MEDIAN	4.4

IMPLEMENTATION OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Stakeholders were provided the option of indicating “Don’t Know” and “Not Applicable” for each of the indicators. A review of these responses can reveal which management areas may have been implemented to a lesser extent. Or, where these areas have been implemented, perhaps this data reveals where there is an opportunity to raise more awareness among internal and external stakeholders regarding what work is being done. However, given that each stakeholder was selected to participate for having direct knowledge about his or her affiliated AEDO’s operations, there is a greater likelihood that such answers reveal a lack of implementation of a particular practice (particularly true of those items with a large number of Not Applicable responses).

Combined, these answers represented 8.5 percent of total responses. The Performance Tracking System was the management area with the highest percentage of Don’t Know or Not Applicable responses (16.5 percent), as was the case in 2006. As occurred for some of the other management areas, there was one indicator that skewed the average percent for Performance Tracking Systems, and that was whether the system is used to inform adjustments to staff salaries and bonuses. Because many employers and employees handle these types of matters with much discretion, this particular finding is not surprising.

Notably, while Human Resources had the lowest percentage of “Don’t Know” and “Not Applicable” answers in 2006, this quality management area had the second highest percentage of such answers in 2009. Rounding out the top three here was Use of Technology. Like Performance Tracking, these areas were skewed by one or two indicators – in these cases, relating to sustainability. These findings suggest that many of the AEDOs may lag behind on implementing, or raising awareness about what they have implemented, on certain “green” activities. This is not surprising given that practices in this area are an emerging trend.

Stakeholders provided the fewest responses of “Don’t Know” and “Not Applicable,” as a percent of the total, to the management areas of Partnerships and Relationships, Customer and Market Focus, and Results. This data, in combination with the relatively high ratings provided for these areas, reinforces the notion that overall the AEDOs have successfully implemented key activities related to relationship building among customers and partners. This suggests the

vital importance that having effective relationships play toward being among the “best of the best.”

MANAGEMENT AREA	DON'T KNOW	NOT APPLICABLE	ALL ANSWERS	PERCENT	INDICATOR WITH HIGHEST PERCENT
Performance Tracking System	79	5	510	16.5%	System used to make appropriate adjustments to staff salaries or bonus scales
Human Resources	84	18	789	12.9%	Staff provided incentives to encourage "clean commute" options
Use of Technology	60	1	510	12.0%	EDO disposes of old technologies in an environmentally sustainable manner
Strategic Planning	33	63	1044	9.2%	Strategic plan adequately addresses tourism development
Communications System	34	1	408	8.6%	EDO regularly updates partners' Web sites and databases with community information
Leadership	58	7	812	8.0%	Board expects, evaluates, and rewards innovative performance by staff
Process Management	42	2	612	7.2%	EDO implements recycling/ environmental processes in everyday operations
Results	29	3	663	4.8%	(Near Tie) Staff are satisfied with performance of EDO, and community citizens are satisfied with performance of EDO
Customer and Market Focus	10	17	678	4.0%	EDO understands and addresses the needs of visitors and newcomers

MANAGEMENT AREA	DON'T KNOW	NOT APPLICABLE	ALL ANSWERS	PERCENT	INDICATOR WITH HIGHEST PERCENT
Partnerships and Relationships	17	8	714	3.5%	(Near Tie) EDO collaborates effectively with local EDOs, and EDO shares and receives ideas with other EDOs
TOTAL	446	125	6,740	8.5%	

INNOVATION MANAGEMENT

Interwoven among the 127 indicators were 11 that focused on support for and level of innovation taking place within the AEDOs. The results suggest that the AEDOs are most skilled in their use of internal knowledge sources (4.5) and sharing and receiving ideas with other EDOs (4.5). Among these two, the collaboration with other EDOs was also among the top-rated indicators in 2006.

Areas most in need of improvement are in the Leadership management area, specifically relating to the community leadership's embrace change and new ideas (3.8), the board's toleration and acceptance of mistakes when new ideas are implemented (3.8), and the board rewarding innovative performance by staff (4.0). This was consistent with the findings in 2006.

An overall assessment conveys that the AEDOs are generally innovative, with a 4.4 weighted average for the indicator "The EDO is innovative," and a collective average and median score of 4.2 for the 11 Innovation indicators. These ratings exceeded those of 2006.

INNOVATION MANAGEMENT INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The EDO effectively utilizes internal knowledge sources to continually improve its work processes.	4.5
The EDO shares and receives ideas with and from other EDOs.	4.5
The EDO is innovative.	4.4
The EDO effectively utilizes external knowledge sources to continually improve its work processes.	4.3
The EDO engages partners to develop new ideas.	4.2
The EDO's strategic plan reflects some incorporation of new ideas and strategies that differ from those tried in previous years.	4.2
Staff regularly create, share, and apply new ideas.	4.2

INNOVATION MANAGEMENT INDICATOR	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The EDO implements innovative practices for addressing customer and stakeholder needs.	4.2
The EDO board expects, evaluates, and rewards innovative performance by staff.	4.0
The EDO board tolerates and accepts mistakes when trying new ideas.	3.8
Community leadership embraces change and new ideas.	3.8
AVERAGE	4.2
MEDIAN	4.2

TOP 10 OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Even the “best of the best” must regularly self-assess areas where improvement would be beneficial, if for no other reason than to maintain the superior standards that have been achieved. Following are the 10 indicators that received the lowest weighted average scores, which can be considered the areas in greatest need of improvement among the AEDOs. Six of the 10 management areas were represented in this list, suggesting EDOs have an opportunity to improve in a variety of areas.

One area which particularly stands out relates to sustainability; while this is not defined as a “management area,” the four indicators which were added to the 2009 survey that represent sustainability considerations represent an area of increasingly recognized importance to achieving organizational excellence. With three of these four indicators appearing in the top 10 opportunities list (highlighted with green and italicized font), it appears that efforts to facilitate the “greening” of EDOs and their activities is warranted. Of these three indicators was the lowest rated indicator among of the 127 in the assessment – that is, the provision of staff incentives to encourage “clean commute” options (2.6).²

The “greening” of office policies and procedures is a recent, growing trend, so the AEDOs are not necessarily behind other sectors of the U.S. economy. These findings highlight the opportunity for AEDOs to step forward among other EDOs and businesses in their communities to set an example of implementing more sustainable activities and policies in their operations.

One significant difference between the 2006 and 2009 results was the absence of any Performance Tracking System indicators in the top opportunities for improvement. In 2006, this quality management area accounted for eight of the 10 opportunities identified.

² The fourth sustainability measure included in the survey, in the management area of Use of Technology, was the EDO’s disposal of old technologies in a environmentally sustainable manner, which received a relatively high weighted average rating of 4.1.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT INDICATOR	AREA	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1. <i>Staff are provided incentives to encourage "clean commute" options, such as riding light rail, carpooling, biking, etc.</i>	Human Resources	2.6
2. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to tourism development.	Strategic Planning	3.4
3. <i>The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to sustainability/green development.</i>	Strategic Planning	3.4
4. The EDO's strategic plan adequately addresses needs relating to downtown development/redevelopment.	Strategic Planning	3.5
5. <i>The EDO implements recycling and/or other environmentally sustainable processes in its everyday operations.</i>	Performance Measures	3.6
6. The EDO board participates in appropriate board member training programs.	Leadership	3.6
7. The EDO has a reliable funding structure and receives support from several sources.	Results	3.7
8. The EDO has been able to expand its resources through relationships with alternative funding sources.	Partnerships and Relationships	3.8
9. Community leadership embraces change and new ideas.	Process Management	3.8
10. The EDO board tolerates and accepts mistakes when trying new ideas.	Leadership	3.8

BEST PRACTICES

For 20 indicators, the AEDOs scored very highly (with a weighted average of greater than 4.5), thus representing the areas within which the AEDOs most excel. This was notably higher than what was seen in 2006. These indicators reflect the best practices of the "best of the best."

Seven management areas were represented in this list; the one with the most indicators represented was Customer and Market Focus. This suggests the participating AEDOs' most outstanding attribute may be their prioritization of their customer's needs and concerns.

BEST PRACTICES INDICATOR	MANAGEMENT AREA	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The EDO obeys laws and regulations.	Results	4.69
The EDO demonstrates high standards and ethics.	Results	4.68

BEST PRACTICES INDICATOR	MANAGEMENT AREA	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The EDO's office is easy to find and centrally located within its service area.	Customer and Market Focus	4.68
The EDO is effective at understanding and addressing the needs of prospects.	Customer and Market Focus	4.65
The EDO has an effective relationship with statewide and regional economic development partners.	Partnerships and Relationships	4.64
The EDO's office provides privacy for conferences.	Customer and Market Focus	4.63
The EDO staff are known for being "customer-friendly."	Customer and Market Focus	4.61
The EDO is able to respond to its customers and stakeholders in a timely and effective manner.	Process Management	4.61
The EDO has had a positive impact on the community's economic development.	Results	4.61
The EDO is considered a local expert on economic matters.	Results	4.60
The EDO has an effective referral system with state, regional and other resource partners.	Process Management	4.59
The EDO effectively utilizes electronic or Web-based research services.	Use of Technology	4.59
The EDO has an effective relationship with local government.	Partnerships and Relationships	4.56
Board members are actively involved in other community organizations.	Partnerships and Relationships	4.55
The EDO's community information and marketing materials are current and professional.	Customer and Market Focus	4.53
The EDO regularly issues electronic and/or print news releases, newsletters, or other materials on its activities and progress.	Communication Systems	4.52
The EDO provides on-line services through its Web site or another mechanism.	Use of Technology	4.52
The EDO uses adequate communications tools for supporting staff connectivity.	Use of Technology	4.52
The executive director has adequate control over the organization's work processes.	Process Management	4.52
The EDO's office is functional, well-maintained, and orderly.	Leadership	4.51

CONCLUSION

The 2009 benchmarking survey of AEDO performance demonstrated that there are several management areas and specific best practices in which AEDOs excel. The AEDOs scored well (4.0 and above) in all 10 key areas of quality management. The survey findings offer useful programmatic ideas for all economic development organizations. Likewise, while the AEDOs clearly excel in many areas, the identified opportunities for improvement provide areas for these and other organizations to consider when making changes for advancing organizational success. The following are the key highlights of the assessment survey.

- The “best of the best” continue to be top notch in the management areas of Customer and Market Focus, Partnerships and Relationships, and Results. The AEDOs received top marks in both 2006 and 2009 for their focus on the customer. They are known for fostering highly effective relationships with partners at the local, regional, and state level and with internal stakeholders (e.g., both staff and board members) as well. And, their success in both regards likely has a direct impact on their ability to achieve the excellent results they are reputed to achieve.
- The AEDOs demonstrated success in improving their efforts in the Use of Technology and Communications System management areas, as evidenced by their relative jump in the overall rankings for these management areas from 2006 to 2009. By becoming leaders in their use of technology, AEDOs, and likewise all economic development organizations, have an opportunity to convey a first and lasting impression on prospective investors about whether their community can suit the technology needs of business. Given the importance of technology on communications, maintaining an effective communications system can be all the more challenging when use of technology is lagging; likewise, a communications system can be all the more impactful, when there is optimal use of technology advancements.
- In 2006, the Performance Tracking System was the management area representing the greatest opportunity for improvement. While the 2009 findings suggest that this area remains a top opportunity for further improvement, AEDOs have demonstrated notable progress since 2006. Continuing to emphasize opportunities to more effectively track performance data and use that data to inform management decisions can be a means to (1) facilitate more effective adjustments to inevitable change in the community; (2) identify inefficiencies that need to be addressed; (3) understand how to best prioritize future programs of work; (4) communicate quantifiable measures of success to stakeholders; and, (5) in the words of Jim Collins, go from “Good to Great.”
- The Leadership management area improved somewhat in the relative rankings from 2006 to 2009, but considering its importance to EDO operational and management success, this continues to be another significant opportunity for improvement. Specifically, leadership development for board members

remains an area of concern, ranking the last among the Leadership indicators, and among the lowest of the 127 in the survey.

- Human Resources was the management area that saw its overall ratings drop most significantly from 2006, resulting in being among the bottom three rated management areas in 2009. The findings signal the possibility that more of the AEDOs are experiencing staff turnover in 2009 than those in 2006. It is also possible that there is a lower degree of implementation of certain human resources practices, as denoted by the relatively high volume of “don’t know” and “not applicable” answers provided by stakeholders. Further investigation is warranted to determine if this is the case and, if so, to explore explanatory factors.
- The Innovation Management measures are another area where progress has been made since 2006. The key indicator of “the EDO is innovative” rose in ranking relative to the other innovation measures. As concluded in the 2006 report, further focusing efforts on improving support for creativity and innovation would leverage staff and leadership talent and potentially bolster the impact of the EDO’s work.
- Probably the most visible opportunity for improvement is in the area of sustainability. In the past few years, consumers and producers alike have become increasingly aware of and interested in improving the sustainability of their operations and processes. As with their use of technology, EDOs are the first and main point of contact for many existing and prospective constituencies. Also, EDOs are often well-positioned as a community leader, so their sustainability work should help serve as a catalyst for green practices, and green economic development, throughout the community. Thus, by taking more proactive measures to employ green practices, EDOs not only can reduce their particular carbon footprint, they can also encourage others to do so – and by doing both, improve their community’s image and make their community more attractive for green business development.
- Although AEDOs appear to demonstrate enterprise excellence in all 10 key areas of quality management, there are opportunities for continual improvement even among the “best of the best.” Programs to provide advanced organization management training to address these opportunities should be explored.

Through this joint IEDC-EI² initiative, the AEDOs have provided an inside view to the dynamics involved with being a high performance organization in economic development and have pointed to opportunities for continual improvement – and, by doing so, have informed others in their “Search of Excellence,” echoing the words of Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr.